

**The
Parlement
of foules**

Al be she never of love me behette,
Than oghte she be myn thourgh hir mercy,
for other bond can I noon on hir knette.
for never, for no wo, ne shal I lette
To serven hir, how fer so that she wende;
Sey what yow list, my tale is at an ende.

¶ Right as the fresshe, rede rose newe
Hyen the somer/sonne coloured is,
Right so for shame al wexen gan the bewe
Of this formel, whan that she herde al this;
She neyther answerde Wel, ne seyde amis,
So sore abasshed was she, til that Nature
Seyde, Doghter, drede yow noght, I yow
assure.

¶ Another tercel egle spak anoon
Of lower kinde, and seyde: That shal not be;
I love hir bet than ye do, by seynt John,
Or atte leste I love hir as wel as ye;
And lenger have served hir, in my degree,
And if she shulde have loved for long loving,
To me allone had been the guerdoning.

I dar eek seye, if she me finde fals,
Unkinde, jangler, or rebel any wyse,
Or jalous, do me hongen by the hals!
And but I bere me in hir servyse
As wel as that my wit can me suffyse,
fro poynt to poynt, hir honour for to save,
Tak she my lyf, and al the good I have.

¶ The thridde tercel egle answerde tho:
Now, sirs, ye seen the litel leyser here;
for every foul cryeth out to been ago
forth with his make, or with his lady dere;
And eek Nature herself ne wol nought here,
for taryng here, noght half that I wolde seye;
And but I speke, I mot for sorwe deye.

Of long servyse avaunte I me nothing,
But as possible is me to dye today
for wo, as he that hath ben languissching
Thise twenty winter, and wel happen may
A man may serven bet and more to pay
In half a yere, although hit were no more,
Than som man doth that hath served ful yore.

I ne say not this by me, for I ne can
Do no servyse that may my lady plesse;
But I dar seyn, I am hir trewest man
As to my dome, and feynest wolde hir ese;
At shorte wordes, til that deth me sese,
I wol ben hires, whether I wake or winke,
And trewe in al that herte may bethinke.

¶ Of al my lyf, sin that day I was born,
So gentil plee in love or other thing
Ne herde never no man me biforn,
Whoso that hadde leyser and cunning
for to reherse hir chere and hir speking;
And from the morwe gan this speche laste
Til downward drow the sonne wonder faste.

The noyse of foules for to ben delivered
So loude rong, Have doon and let us wende!
That wel wende I the wode had al toshivered.
Come of! they cryde, alas! ye wil us shende!
Whan shal your cursed pleding have an ende?
How shulde a juge eyther party leve,
for yee or nay, withouten any preve?

¶ The goos, the cokkow, and the doke also
So cryden Kek, kek! kukkow! quck, quck! hye,
That thorgh myn eres the noyse wente tho.
The goos seyde: Al this nis not worth a flye!
But I can shape hereof a remedye,
And I wol sey my verdit faire and swythe
for water/foul, whoso be wrooth or blythe.

¶ And I for worm/foul, seyde the fool kukkow,
for I wol, of myn owne auctorite,
for comune spede, take the charge now,
for to delivere us is gret charite.
¶ Ye may abyde a while yet, parde!
Seide the turtel, if hit be your wille
A wight may speke, him were as good be stille.

I am a seed/foul, oon the unworthieste,
That wot I wel, and litel of kunninge;
But bet is that a wightes tonge reeste
Than entremeten him of such doinge
Of which he neyther rede can nor singe,
And whoso doth, ful foule himself acloyeth,
for office uncommitted ofte anoyeth.

¶ Nature, which that alway had an ere
To murmur of the lewednes behinde,
With facound voys seide: Hold your tonges there!
And I shal sone, I hope, a counseyl finde
You to delivere, and fro this noyse unbinde;
I juge, of every folk men shal oon calle
To seyn the verdit for you foules alle.

¶ Assented were to this conclusioun
The briddes alle; and foules of ravyne
han chosen first, by pleyn eleccioun,
The tercelet of the faucon, to diffyne
Al hir sentence, and as him list, termyne;
And to Nature him gonnen to presente,
And she accepteth him with glad entente.

The tercelet seide than in this manere:
ful hard were hit to preve hit by resoun
Who loveth best this gentil formel here;
for everich hath swich replicacioun,
That noon by skillis may be broght adoun;
I can not seen that arguments avayle;
Than semeth hit ther moste be batayle.

¶ Al redy! quod these egles tercelis tho.
Nay, sirs! quod he, if that I dorste it seye,
Ye doon me wrong, my tale is not ydo!
for sirs, ne taketh noght agref, I preye,
It may noght gon, as ye wolde, in this weye;
Oure is the voys that han the charge in honde,
And to the juges dome ye moten stonde;

And therfor pees! I seye, as to my wit,
We wolde thinke how that the worthieste
Of knighthode, and longest hath used hit,
Moste of estat, of blode the gentileste,
were sittingest for hir, if that hir leste;
And of these three she wot herself, I trowe,
Which that he be, for hit is light to knowe.

¶ The water/foules han her bedes leyd
Togeder, and of short avysement,
Whan everich had his large golee seyde,
They seyden sothly, al by oon assent,
how that The goos, with hir facounde gent,
That so desyret to pronounce our nede,
Shal telle our tale, and preyde God hir spede.

And for these water/foules tho began
The goos to speke, and in hir cakelinge
she seyde: Pees! now tak hepe every man,
And herkeneth which a reson I shal bringe;
My wit is sharp, I love no taryng;
I rede him, though he were my brother,
I seye, I rede him, lat him love another!

¶ To here! a parfit reson of a goos!
Quod the sperhawk; never mot she thee!
Lo, swich hit is to have a tonge loos!
Now parde, fool, yet were hit bet for thee
have holde thy pees, than shewed thy nycete!
hit lyth not in his wit nor in his wille,
But sooth is seyde, A fool can nocht be stille.

¶ The laughter aroos of gentil foules alle,
And right anoon the seed/foul chosen hadde
The turtel trewe, and gunne hir to hem calle,
And preyden hir to seye the sothe sadde
Of this matere, and asked what she radde;
And she answerde, that pleynly hir entente
she wolde shewe, and sothly what she mente.

¶ Nay, God forbede a lover shulde chaunge!
The turtel seyde, and wex for shame al reed;
Thogh that his lady evermore be straunge,
Yet let him serve hir ever, til he be deed;
for sothe, I preyse noght the gooses reed;
for thogh she deyed, I wolde non other make,
I wol ben hires, til that the deth me take.

¶ Wel bourded! quod the doke, by my hat!
That men shulde alway loven, causeles,
Who can a reson finde or wit in that?
Daunceth he mury that is mirtheles?
Who shulde recche of that is reccheles?
Ye, quck! yit quod the doke, ful wel and faire,
Ther been mo sterres, God wot, than a paire!

¶ Now fy, cherl! quod the gentil tercelet,
Out of the dunghil com that word ful right,
Thou canst nocht see which thing is wel beset:
Thou farest by love as oules doon by light,
The day hem blent, ful wel they see by night;
Thy kind is of so lowe a wretchednesse,
That what love is, thou canst nat see ne gesse.

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¶ Tho gan the kukkow putte him forth in pees
for foul that eteth worm, and seide blyve:
So I, quod he, may have my make in pees,
I recche not how longe that ye stryve;
Lat ech of hem be soley al hir lyve,
This is my reed, sin they may not acorde;
This shorte lesson nedeth nocht recorde.

¶ Ye! have the glotoun fild ynogh his paunche,
Than are we wel! seyde the merlioun;
Thou morderer of the heysugge on the braunche
That broghte thee forth, thou rewtheles glotoun!
Live thou soley, wormes corrupcioun!
for no fors is of lakke of thy nature;
Go, lewed be thou, whyl the world may dure!

¶ Now pees, quod Nature, I comaunde here;
for I have herd al your opinoun,
And in effect yet be we never the nere;
But fynally, this is my conclusioun,
That she herself shal han the eleccioun
Of whom hir list, whoso be wrooth or blythe,
him that she cheest, he shal hir have as swythe.

for sith hit may not here discussed be
Who loveth hir best, as seide the tercelet,
Than wol I doon hir this favour, that she
Shal have right him on whom hir herte is set,
And he hir that his herte bath on hir knet.
This juge I, Nature, for I may not lye;
To noon estat I have non other ye.

But as for counseyl for to chese a make,
If hit were reson, certes, than wolde I
Counseyle yow the royal tercel take,
As seide the tercelet ful skilfully,
As for the gentilest and most worthy,
Which I have wrought so wel to my plesaunce;
That to yow oghte been a suffisaunce.

¶ With dredful voys the formel hir answerde:
My rightful lady, goddesse of Nature,
Soth is that I am ever under your yerde,
Lyk as is everiche other creature,
And moot be youres whyl my lyf may dure;
And therfor graunteth me my firste bone,
And myn entente I wol yow sey right sone.

¶ I graunte it you, quod she; and right anoon
This formel egle spak in this degree:
Almighty quene, unto this yere be doon
I aske respit for to avysen me.
And after that to have my choys al free;
This al and som, that I wolde speke and seye;
Ye gete no more, although ye do me deye.

I wol nocht serven Venus ne Cupyde
for sothe as yet, by no manere weye.
¶ Now sin it may non other wyse betyde,
Quod tho Nature, here is no more to seye;
Than wolde I that these foules were aweye
Ech with his make, for taryng lenger here,
And seyde hem thus, as ye shul after here.